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CANNING AND THE SPANISH PATRIOTS IN 1808

THE attitude taken up by a great statesman towards any event of world-wide importance must always be a matter of interest; and interest is heightened when he is comparatively new to office and when the circumstances which call for his decision are complex and unprecedented. No apology need therefore be made for an attempt to elucidate the occurrences which brought Great Britain and the Spanish patriots to an informal but effective alliance in the year 1808, and largely owing to the exertions of Canning.

In the pages of the *AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW* it is needless to describe the events which led to the intervention of Napoleon in the affairs of the Peninsula in the period September, 1807–May, 1808. It may also be taken for granted that readers of this article are familiar with the consequences of his action toward the Spanish dynasty and the Spanish nation. As soon as the news of his treatment of Ferdinand VII., *de facto* king of Spain, became known throughout the Peninsula, the people, with comparatively few exceptions, rose against the government which he sought to impose and requested help from its nominal enemy, Great Britain. The rising, though national in its universality, was provincial in the manner of its manifestation. The intense individuality of the provinces and the difficulty attending concerted action, seeing that Madrid and many other important centres were occupied by French troops, helped to determine the course of the whole movement. In intensity and savagery it resembled a *Jacquerie*; in the bigoted hatred displayed against the French and their partizans the patriots showed themselves to be the true scions of the men who fought under the Duke of Alva; and it will ever be matter for question whether Spain would not have benefited by submitting to Napoleon and to his brother, Joseph Bonaparte. Submission, however, was impossible. Reforms were spurned when offered by the man who had deeply insulted Spanish pride; and the fact that deputies from three provinces of Spain—Asturias, Galicia, and Andalusia—set sail almost simultaneously to appeal for aid from England shows the depth of the animosity against the French emperor after his behavior at Bayonne.

The deputies of the little principality of Asturias were the first to reach London. Those of Galicia and Andalusia soon followed.

There is unfortunately no account in the archives of the British Foreign Office respecting their interview with Canning. From unofficial sources we know that their reception by the populace was extremely cordial; and it was a foregone conclusion that Canning, who had watched the politics of the Peninsula with the most eager interest, would avail himself of the alliance now proffered by the Spanish people. Whether he had any difficulty in overcoming the scruples of the king, always punctilious in matters of diplomatic procedure, is not known. The discussions in the Cabinet are veiled in secrecy; but it may be taken for granted that the ministers were practically of one mind, seeing that the official declaration ordering the cessation of hostilities against Spain appeared on July 4, 1808. Parliament was virtually unanimous in approving this change of policy.

The archives of the British Foreign Office yield nothing of interest on this subject before July 6, 1808. On that day Canning issued instructions to Mr. Charles Stuart directing him to proceed to Corunna on board of H. M. S. *Alcmene*, along with Don Joachim Freire, one of the deputies of the "Kingdom" of Galicia.¹ The despatch continues in these words:

On your arrival at Corunna, Mr [*sic*] Freire will present you to the several members of the Provisional Government of Galicia, who will be apprized by their deputies in London of your appointment and of the nature of the duties which you are to fulfil. You will take the earliest opportunity to inform the Provisional Government that on board of the *Alcmene* is the sum of Two Hundred Thousand Pounds Sterling in Spanish dollars, which His Majesty is pleased to advance by way of loan to the Galician Government and which you are ready to deliver over to any person who may be duly authorized to receive the same.

Stuart is then directed to carry on communications between Spain and the British government and to furnish all the news possible. Mr. Hunter, who was sent to Gijon to act as British consul for the principality, or province, of Asturias, was charged to supply him with information from that quarter. The following sentences at the close of the despatch are of interest as showing Canning's desire for united action in Spain:

You will give it distinctly to be understood that you have no authority to enter into any political engagements and that if any proposals of such a nature should be made to you, you can do no more than transmit them to His Majesty's Govt. for their consideration.

If the Government of Galicia should express any desire that H. M. should appoint an accredited agent to reside at Corunna, you will represent to them the inconvenience which would arise from accrediting

¹ Don Joachim Freire must not be confused with Mr. Hookham Frere, who in October, 1808, was appointed British envoy to the central junta of Spain.

such a number of persons as it would be necessary to send to the different provinces of Spain. You will however assure them that whenever these provinces shall be united so as to constitute a general provisional govt. H. M. will lose no time in sending an accredited Minister to reside at the seat of government wherever it may be fixed. . . . If unfortunately the affairs of Spain should assume an unfavourable aspect, and the French armies should be advancing into Galicia, you will provide for your personal safety by taking refuge on board any of H. M.'s Ships of war.

These sentences, I may remark in passing, tend to disprove the assertions of Sir William Napier that the British Ministry eagerly complied with every suggestion made by the delegates of the provincial juntas of Asturias, Galicia, and Andalusia, and that (to quote his words) :

Discarding all prudent considerations, and entering into formal relations with every knot of Spanish politicians assuming the title of a supreme junta, the government dealt with unsparing hands, enormous supplies at the demand of those self-elected authorities.¹

On the contrary, it appears that from the very first Canning, who was the executant of the Cabinet, tried to take all possible precautions against the multiplication of envoys to Spain; the sequel will show that he was by no means prone to grant all the demands of the delegates named above.

Canning's next despatch to Stuart, dated July 13, 1808, informed him of the sending of 160,294 dollars by H. M. S. *Dryad* for the use of the authorities in Galicia—a sum which would complete the sum of 1,000,000 dollars originally designed for that purpose. The despatch of this sum would, said Canning, remove the objections raised by Don Joachim Freire as to delay. On July 27 Canning wrote to Hunter and to Stuart, stating that Mr. Duff was sent to Cadiz to resume his position as British consul at that place and with a view to entering into communication with the junta of Seville. He again impressed on Hunter the supreme need of union between the Spanish provinces. It will be well to quote his own words, inasmuch as they refute another charge levelled by Napier against him to the following effect :

The English cabinet was indeed sanguine, and yet the ministers, while anticipating success in a preposterous manner, displayed little industry and less judgment in their preparations for the struggle.²

We have already seen that Canning faced the probability that the French forces might penetrate even to Corunna. Let us now

¹ Sir William F. P. Napier, *The War in the Peninsula*, vol. I., book II., ch. I.

² *Ibid.*, book III., ch. I.

see what he said with respect to the building up of a new national fabric in Spain. In the despatch of July 27 already referred to he urged Hunter to discourage in every way the separate action of Asturias, not only because such action on the part of all the provinces would embarrass the British government, but also because it would be productive of disunion in Spain. Both Galicia and Asturias had raised their demands for pecuniary help :

Both [deputies] profess, in conversation, to include a provision for the interests of Leon and Old Castile in the demands which they bring forward. But this has not prevented a direct application from Leon; and it is obvious that if the remaining provinces of Spain, from whom no separate or joint application has been made, were to come forward with demands in anything like the proportion of those already received, not only the material means of supplying such demands in specie must be (as they are now nearly) exhausted, but even the credit and resources of this country could hardly answer such accumulated demands.

He then stated that England could not possibly furnish more than 100,000 muskets, exclusive of those already sent with Sir Arthur Wellesley.

In a second draft of the same date Canning informed Hunter that the claims of the junta of Seville to supreme authority in Spain were partly acquiesced in by the deputation from Galicia and Asturias then at London, claims " which their personal rank and qualifications [*i. e.*, those of the deputies of Andalusia], their experience and knowledge of business, are in other respects well calculated to confirm ". He further expressed the hope that the delegations from Galicia and Asturias might be withdrawn—though it was a very delicate matter to arrange—so that the junta at Seville might establish a government which would be regarded as the central authority. In order to facilitate the departure of the deputies sent from the north-west of Spain, Canning suggested that the two provinces above named might send in their place military men to confer on questions of defense and succor. But he did not insist on a matter which obviously required very cautious treatment. I may here remark that the Seville junta had from the first taken a spirited lead. It recounted the injuries and insults inflicted by Napoleon and by his troops; it urged the need of the assembling of the Cortes in order to show the world that Spaniards could reform their own affairs without the need of intervention on the part of " the vile French "; and suggested the forming of juntas in every town and district for the organization of national defense. But, far from assuming direct control of these local efforts, it suggested that each province should at first manage its own affairs, civil and military; but that these

last should be placed under the control of a generalissimo. Thus the primacy claimed by the great province of the south was one of suggestion and initiative rather than of direct control. No other course was possible in a land where the provincial spirit was so strong, and where Madrid and other central points were strongly held by the French. It is clear, however, that Canning was always apprehensive of Spanish provincialism, and that the British agents whom he sent out struggled persistently to bring about the formation of a central government.

The difficulties in their way were enormous, as may be seen by despatches sent to Canning by Stuart. The British envoy, who enjoyed an authority superior to that of Hunter or Duff, reported on July 21 that on his arrival at Corunna on the previous day, Sir Arthur Wellesley and he met with a most enthusiastic welcome both from the junta of Galicia and the populace of the town. The people were not dispirited or dismayed because of the severe defeat inflicted on Cuesta and Blake by Bessières at Rio Seco on July 14; for opposed to the French stood the relics of the Spanish forces; and the mountains of Galicia would be a safe barrier in case of further misfortunes in the field. The following sentences in Stuart's first despatch are especially noteworthy:

No wish for military succour on our part has been manifested by any individual of the Junta with whom I have conversed; they declare that the population of Galicia (which they state to be no less than two million) is fully adequate to supply their waste of men; they say that money and arms are all the country stands in need of to ensure a successful continuance of the war.

He states that no sure news had arrived from other parts of Spain though there were rumors of victories gained over the French at Saragossa, as also in the provinces of Valencia and Andalusia. Stuart adds: "The excessive enthusiasm of every individual I have yet seen induces them to believe whatever may be reported in their favour, however improbable". There is something ironical in the fact that Stuart penned these words on the very day when 23,700 Frenchmen and Swiss under Dupont surrendered to the Andalusian forces at Baylen.

On July 28 Stuart forwarded to his chief further proofs of the strength of provincial feelings in the north of Spain. Galicia, Asturias, and Leon, he wrote, could not agree as to the number of deputies which each of those provinces should send to a common junta, the meeting of which was strongly urged by the British envoy. Feelings ran high between Cuesta and the deputies of Leon and

Asturias; while the men of Leon were furious at the retreat of Blake. He further inclosed a letter sent by Bessières to Blake after the battle of Rio Seco, in which the French marshal urged the Spaniard to insure harmony between the Spanish and French troops, and invited him "à rentrer dans l'ordre". Blake took no notice of this offer.¹ The news of Dupont's surrender, which reached Corunna on August 1, did not facilitate the task of union of the three provinces of the northwest. In vain did Stuart urge the despatch of Blake's army southward to the Portuguese frontier in order to prevent a possible union of Bessières with Junot to the detriment of the British force which had just landed near the mouth of the river Mondego. Blake remained inactive; and Stuart's despatches show the reason for his inaction, namely, that his army had no cavalry and was composed almost entirely of raw recruits, who would have been crushed by Bessières but for the retreat of that marshal, necessitated by the news of the French disaster at Baylen. As for civil affairs, Stuart reported that they were more and more entangled. The intriguing bishop of St. Jago had come to Corunna and was found to be in secret correspondence with Blake, whereupon he was ordered to leave the town. The junta tried to induce the able and popular bishop of Orense to join it, but he for some time refused; and his refusal (wrote Stuart) imperilled the very existence of that body. On August 7 the British envoy summed up his opinions on the situation in the northwest of Spain in terms which deserve quotation almost *in extenso*:

CORUNNA Aug. 7. 1808.

... The government of every part of Spain is at present without exception in the hands of the provincial nobility, or more strictly speaking the gentry of the country, aided by a few persons, who, having formerly held situations in the Ministry at Madrid, had for various reasons retired long since to the provinces. No individual distinguished in the capital for rank, power, or riches has stood forth in support of the cause of Ferdinand VII. Some general officers of merit and reputation are indeed employed in the patriotic armies, but we look in vain for the names of those who have hitherto held the highest military commands; they have been happy to remain tranquil, though many have embraced the party of Joseph Bonaparte, and many have fallen victims to the ferocity of the mob; the names of Solano, Helos, Filangieri, are among the latter; while Campo d'Alanze, Negriti, O'Farrill and Masaredo, have joined the French.

The Provincial nobility naturally feel strong local attachments, and are less interested in the general cause than in the welfare of their own particular province. Hence difficulties have arisen impeding the assembly of a general Cortez: those who have enjoyed the advantage of

¹ Blake was of Irish descent, but his family had long been domiciled in Spain.

supreme authority and the exercise of power are unwilling to become the mere organ through whom the orders of a superior body shall be executed. The satisfaction of providing for dependents and relations has likewise biassed many very patriotic men, and induces them to find out specious arguments in favour of their own provinces, though prejudicial to the general interests of the State. Every Junta desires that the Cortez shall be established near their own firesides [*sic*], and many, anxious to retain their consequence, wish to increase the number of deputies from their provinces sufficiently to depute every member of their own body to that assembly, and thus, by incorporating themselves in the national representation, to retain their power.

Stuart then states that innumerable jealousies had arisen from these causes, and he advises that His Majesty's government should remonstrate with the Spanish deputies in London and insist on the speedy union of the Cortes, and suggest also

that the assembly of that body besides causing the formal recognition of the independence of the whole peninsula might operate to induce H. M.'s Government to contribute much more efficaciously to their assistance. I have written to the principal people in every province which has any communication with this place to urge very strongly the necessity of union and a supreme government. I not only spoke fully to the Junta on the subject, but gave them my arguments in writing.

He then states that there was much heat and violence of feeling at Corunna, but that finally the bishop of Orense had agreed to join the junta of Galicia. The French were, however, very weak, their chief force being at Burgos. It was now suggested that British troops should land at Santander, but Stuart thought this dangerous, as it was too near to France and the Spaniards were too full of divisions to afford much help. He continues:

The Asturians have in vain asked for artillery from the depots in Galicia: and the Stores landed at Gihon and not used by the Asturians, have remained at that port and in Oviedo, altho' they would have afforded a seasonable relief to the army of Genl. Blake. . . . The French have omitted no offer to tempt the ambition and corrupt the integrity of the patriotic leaders: besides the letter to Genl. Blake, they have addressed every other person invested with command. Marshal Bessières offered Genl. Cuesta the vice-royalty of the Mexico if he would consent to abandon the cause he had espoused; the latter however did not condescend to return an answer to the proposal. . . . It is most lucky that the division of the French force has kept pace with the division of their opponents; their losses must have taught them, however, that they were in error; and they appear now to be about to adopt a contrary system: if therefore these people do not unite their political and military means, and teach their men to act in great bodies, it will not be easy for them to maintain the advantages they have so fortunately gained. Having in some degree moderated the dissensions among them, I daily enlarge on the necessity of attention to their federal interests; but the province

of Galicia and its government does [*sic*] not appear to be respected by the rest of Spain; and, placed as I am at the very extremity of the Kingdom, I fear it will be difficult to render service unless I approach the centre of the Peninsula; which I am unwilling to do without directions from home.

To revert to military affairs, it may be of interest to quote from a letter written by General Blake to the president of the junta of Galicia, in which that commander expressed the hope that a British force would soon land in the north of Spain, either at Corunna or at Santander. The letter, dated August 15 at Astorga, was forwarded by Stuart to Canning. In it Blake stated that he had heard news portending the arrival of a British force of 30,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry in the north of Spain; and he referred to the matter in terms which marked him off sharply from the presumptuous civilians of the junta of Galicia, who scouted the thought of British help save in money and stores. Blake expected the British cavalry to land at Corunna, the infantry disembarking at Santander, where it would threaten the French communications between Burgos and the Pyrenees. On the whole, however, he preferred that the British expedition should come to Gijon, the chief port of Asturias, where it would form

an imposing mass capable of undertaking very important operations, even in the event of the march of the [Spanish] army from Andalusia being retarded. . . . Your Highness will see the importance of preparing in abundance provisions for the English on the road from Corunna, and barley, oats, grass and straw for their horses, remembering that the soldiers of that nation are little sparing and accustomed to much meat at their meals, an object which it is luckily not difficult to provide in Galicia. It is equally necessary that there should not be wanting on the route all the waggons that may be requisite for transporting the baggage and effects. For all which, as for providing quarters, it is indispensable that Your Highness should send out some respectable active and confidential persons commissioned by you. If the winds and naval combinations should not allow of the infantry being conveyed to Asturias without a considerable delay, the whole disembarkation must necessarily take place at Coruña, but the reasons for preferring the former point [*sic*] are of great weight. God preserve Your Highness many years.

(Signed) JOAQUIN BLAKE.

In his next despatches, written at Corunna between August 9 and August 22, Stuart reported the continuance of the dispute between the juntas of Leon and Galicia, while the latter body now refused to admit the supremacy of the junta of Seville. He added that the claim of Andalusia to take precedence arose, in part at least, from the custom of the four kingdoms of Andalusia styling them-

selves collectively España—"a term which strictly does not extend to the other provinces of the Peninsula". In the important matter of commerce Stuart took steps which facilitated the import of British goods, not only into Spain, but also into her South-American colonies. He described on August 22 the difficulties experienced by British trading-vessels, which, having put into Corunna, found all entry for their cargoes barred by the almost prohibitive tariff adopted by Spain in 1806. They were about to weigh anchor; but Stuart used his influence with the authorities, who thereupon promised to revise a tariff drawn up in the interests of France and in a sense hostile to Great Britain. In a very short space of time the necessary alterations were made in the tariff, the duty on baizes (the chief British export to Corunna) being reduced from thirty-two per cent. ad valorem to sixteen per cent.; while that on coarse cloths was lowered to twelve per cent. In the far more important sphere of South-American trade Stuart sought to gain favorable terms in place of the prohibitive régime previously existing. He sounded various persons who were about to sail to those colonies, and especially Admiral Hindrobo, who was proceeding to Buenos Ayres as viceroy *ad interim*. Stuart's influence (so he averred) had been partly instrumental in procuring this appointment for the admiral; and when, on the twenty-fourth, it appeared that the proclamation drawn up by the Galician junta to those colonies was long, dull, and one-sided (no mention being made of the help afforded by Great Britain to Spain), the new viceroy proffered the assurance that he would suppress that document and replace it by a fairer and more spirited manifesto. Clearly Stuart excelled in the arts of intrigue, and was by no means prone to depreciate his own services; but it may be conceded that, in opening up to British merchants trade with the north of Spain and indirectly with South America, he rendered very great service to his country. The United Kingdom was then feeling severely the constricting grip of the continental system, the efficacy of which had been nearly doubled by the treaty of Tilsit (July 7, 1807). British trade with the Baltic ports, except those of Sweden, could thenceforth filter in only by indirect channels; but the opening of many harbors of Spain and Portugal, and a little later of their colonies, made up for the loss sustained in the north. It is hardly too much to say that Canning's intervention in Spain brought about results in the spheres of politics and commerce which might be summed up in his later magniloquent phrase: "I called in the New World to redress the balance in the Old World."

In one matter Stuart drew on himself a sharp rebuke from his

chief. He had used phrases in one of his despatches which Canning interpreted as committing Great Britain to the sending of a military force into the north of Spain. Canning on August 30 penned a strong remonstrance to the envoy for holding out any hopes in that direction, assigning as his chief reason that the Spanish deputies then in London

showed a manifest disinclination to the sending into Spain of any British military force whatever, and received every intimation of a disposition to make that effort in a manner which rather justified the conclusion that it would be disagreeable to the feelings of the Spanish nation—feelings which His Maj. was determined in every instance to respect. The Spanish deputies concurred in pointing out Portugal as the most eligible destination for an useful and effective application of whatever force His Maj. could employ for the support of Spain, as being the point best calculated for preventing the otherwise probable attempt of Junot to reinforce the French armies in Spain; and as placing His Maj.'s troops, after a successful occupation of Lisbon, in a situation to keep open the communication between the northern and southern provinces of Spain and to afford support to the one or the other, as either might appear to stand in need of it. This reasoning, which was that of the Spanish deputies themselves, was also that of all the military authorities by which the determination of His Maj. was guided.

Canning then stated that no division of the British expedition would be allowed until Portugal was "thoroughly cleared of the French armies"; that the Spanish deputies later on had begged for cavalry for their army of the north, but had not gained their request; and no such request would be listened to unless it came from the junta through Stuart. The War Office had sent Major-general Broderick and Major-general Leith to collect news on military matters in Galicia and Asturias, but they had no further powers.

Somewhat later Stuart was able to show that he had in no way favored the despatch of a British army into the north of Spain. For the present his efforts were directed to the task of uniting the juntas of Galicia, Asturias, and Leon, with a view to the formation of a national union, though he found that the autocratic views of the Seville junta were disapproved by the more democratic people of the northwest. The three juntas of the northwestern provinces finally agreed to meet at Lugo. It was hoped that, when Estremadura joined them, they would transfer their sessions to Sória, and would there await the deputies from Aragon, Valencia, and Catalonia. The final union, that with the southern provinces, was expected to take place at Guadalajara, where the now truly national Cortes would elect a regency of eight persons to exercise the functions of government in the name of Ferdinand VII. That town

was preferred to Madrid, owing to the turbulence of the lower classes at the capital.

Asturias refused to join its neighbors; but the accession of Castile gave to the union of the northern provinces an enhanced importance. At the first meeting of the united juntas of Galicia, Castile, and Leon, held on August 29, the president of the last-named province was chosen to act as president for the month: he at once proposed that each province should choose two deputies to represent it in the supreme junta. Despite the opposition of Galicia to a proposal which rendered nugatory all the further discussions at Lugo, it was carried by twenty-four votes as against six dissentients. On being asked to take part in the discussion, Stuart complied and spoke, though somewhat guardedly, in favor of a national union based on constitutional methods. About ten days later the deputies selected for these duties proceeded toward Madrid; and Stuart, on the request of Don Antonio, accompanied them. On his arrival at Valladolid, he found intrigues afoot, started by the old and discredited council of Castile with a view to the restoration of its power. At Segovia on September 15 he had an interview with General Cuesta, who was there with about 12,000 troops. The general admitted that national union could alone put an end to the existing anarchy, one result of which was that the northern provinces had kept all the money and supplies sent from England for the common cause, and that he had received nothing. Stuart departed for Madrid with the conviction that Cuesta would help on the unionist movement; but, on arriving at the capital, he heard that the general had arrested Don Antonio and other deputies at Segovia, on the pretext that their election was illegal or irregular. Against this tyrannical action Stuart protested most strongly, and countermanded the order for the sending of supplies and stores to Cuesta's army. Ultimately the deputies from nearly all the provincial juntas met at Aranjuez, and there was some talk of depriving Cuesta of his command for this insult to the deputies of the nation; but even the central junta hesitated to take a step which might possibly have led Cuesta to march against them. This episode, and many others which must be omitted for lack of space, show the unheard-of difficulties which faced the new deputies. Even the retreat of the French into Navarre tended to increase the complexity of the civic problems; for it puffed up the Spaniards with a pride which made them almost impervious to argument. The escape of nearly the whole of Romana's corps from the shores of Denmark on British ships tended to enhance the influence of the British envoy at Aranjuez; but that influence was for a time

eclipsed on the receipt of the news of the so-called "Convention of Cintra" (August 30, 1808). It may be well to publish here the despatch which Stuart sent to Canning on September 26, protesting against the terms of that compact, by the fifth article of which Junot's corps was to be transported to France on British vessels without any stipulation forbidding its use in the present war:

Sir,

Lord William Bentinck arrived here yesterday, bringing with him a copy of the capitulation concluded with the French at Lisbon.

Although it is necessary to maintain a strict silence towards the Government here upon that subject, I think it my duty not only to call your attention to the consequences that will indubitably result from that measure in the present situation of the armies of this country, but to require you for the sake of the public service to do whatever may be in your power to retard the execution.

The Spanish force amounting to 80000 men and consisting chiefly of armed peasants, occupies the following points: Palafox with the Arragonese at Sanguessa, Llamas with the Valencians at Tarragona, Castaños with the Andalusians etc at Soria: Cuesta with the army of Castile at Burgos de Osma: Blake with the Galicians at Reynosa.

These troops, however well disposed, are ill armed and worse clothed, wholly without shoes, and being for the greater part unaccustomed to the cold climate of the Pyrenees, it is not surprising that illness manifests itself amongst them in the present rainy season.

The French have 45,000 men concentrated in Navarre near Pampeluna, and along the Ebro. Their advanced posts are near Burgos. We know upon good authority that everything from the interior of France has marched to the Rhine, and consequently they can expect no succours from the Western Departments.¹

The arrival of 25,000 men, armed, clothed, and accustomed to the climate, in any part of the Bay of Biscay is the most deadly blow that can fall on this nation; and every means by which you can delay the departure of Junot's divisions, who are in fact succours sailing under our flag to the dispirited French army in the Pyrenees, will prove valuable to the cause of Spain.

The importance of retaining transports to send assistance to the weak points of our allies in Biscay and Catalonia, will not have escaped your observation; but the positive necessity of delaying the smallest portion of Junot's army is the more an object of consideration to ourselves, because, united with Jourdan, they will constitute a mass of effective force which our whole army in Portugal together with all the forces brought into the field by Spain will find it no easy matter to oppose again with hopes of success.

In his covering despatch of September 26 to Canning, Stuart

¹ This was exaggerated. Napoleon, while keeping a close watch upon Austria—it was the time of the Erfurt conference—was beginning to collect troops for the reconquest of Spain.

added these words :

This country [Spain] will have little cause to rejoice that the army set at liberty to act against them did not remain blocked up at Lisbon, from whence they had no possible chance of escaping by land.

This consideration seems to have escaped the notice of writers who, from Napier onward, have tried to defend the convention. Some of their arguments in its favor are not without weight in themselves; but they fail to meet the objection that Junot's position in Portugal was most precarious. After the retreat of Bessières from Leon to Burgos and the line of the Ebro, that marshal could no longer hope to succor the French in Portugal, as had seemed possible for a few days after the French victory of Rio Seco. To remove Junot's force from a position which was hopeless to one where it could soon render effective service was surely a piece of sheer folly. Yet Napier refused to consider this objection, and, with a violence of language which he frequently used, stigmatized the opposition to the convention in England as "the most outrageous and disgraceful public clamour ever excited by the falsehoods of venal political writers".¹ Canning was not of that opinion: he markedly dissociated himself from those who upheld the convention and the favorable verdict of the court of inquiry on the conduct of those who signed it; probably Stuart's despatch quoted above influenced his action in this affair. Apart from that, the despatch had no effect. Junot's first division set sail from Lisbon on September 15; and when Stuart was penning his protest at Madrid, preparations were nearly complete for sending away the last of the French troops, which left Portugal at the end of the month or early in October.

In his despatch of September 30 Stuart again dwelt on the gloom and annoyance caused by the escape of Junot's corps; but those feelings had not lessened the feeling of confidence still prevalent in Spain, as may be seen by the following extract :

All here [at Aranjuez] appear of opinion that, if their measures should be successful in Navarre, and they should be sufficiently strong to obtain the passes of the Pyrenees, that [*sic*] it will be expedient to transfer the theatre of war wholly to Catalonia, and from thence to attack the French frontier in conformity to the old plan of General Urutia and the opinion of many general officers, that offensive operations can be carried on with greater advantages on the canal of Languedoc than on any other part of the French frontier.

Seeing that Stuart had recently reported the determination of the supreme junta to intrust the control of military affairs to a com-

¹ Napier, *The War in the Peninsula*, vol. I., bk. II., ch. 6.

mittee of five men who were jointly to hold the portfolio of the war ministry, it is somewhat surprising that he took the Spanish forecast of events at all seriously. In any case, his despatches show the inevitableness of the overthrow of the Spaniards in the ensuing weeks, when Napoleon with a mighty army scattered their levies and sent their still discordant deputies flying to the extremities of the Peninsula. But the work of the British envoy was not wholly undone: he had helped in the formation of a national representative body; and that body and its successors, whatever their imperfections and follies (on which British historians have so complacently desecanted), enabled a seemingly moribund people to enter on a new lease of life and persistently to oppose Napoleon's schemes of domination. Canning's despatches also tend to disprove the charges of recklessness and insular selfishness which Napier laid to his count. The British Foreign Minister at first helped the Spanish provinces as provinces because they possessed the only governmental machinery then available; but he refused to recognize the provincial juntas, and sought by all possible means to further their union in a national assembly. The experiment broke down in 1808; but Canning undoubtedly pointed the way toward a course of action which was to prove successful in the year 1813. It is time that his memory should be cleared from the charges which have been brought against him by Napier and by other Francophil historians. To show from evidence, which must be regarded as the final court of appeal, the complexity of the task which faced him and his agents in the Peninsula, and the manner in which he and they sought to grapple with it, has been my aim in this article.

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